

FEMALE JUVENILE JUSTICE REPORT

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Iowa Commission on the Status of Women
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FEMALE JUVENILE OFFENDERS ABOUT THE STUDIES

These two studies were conducted by Boddy Media Group on behalf of the Iowa Commission on the Status of Women. The report contains findings gathered through the following:

Study One: The Qualitative Study

- Goals:**
- 1) To understand the scope of the issues related to female juveniles in Iowa's justice system;
 - 2) To identify the various types of treatment female juvenile offenders receive and attempt to gauge the effectiveness of those treatment options; and
 - 3) To gain personal insight into the current situation for female juvenile offenders from both the offenders and the staff who work with them.

Details: Four focus groups were conducted with a total of 26 female juvenile offenders currently in detention facilities at two different locations in the state.

Three one-on-one interviews were conducted with female juvenile offenders.

One roundtable discussion group of twelve people held in Des Moines including:

- A principal at an alternative school;
- A juvenile court officer;
- Juvenile court staff;
- Female juvenile offender program officials;
- Group home and detention center directors; and
- Department of Human Services officials.

Telephone interviews with detention center directors, Chief Juvenile Court Officers, juvenile court staff, trackers, group home and day treatment facility directors and staff, and officials with the Iowa Department of Human Services.

Method: All focus groups in this study were moderated by Pat Boddy, Kim Shelquist, and Erin Skold of Boddy Media Group, a communications research firm based in Des Moines, Iowa. Discussion in each group lasted approximately two hours.

One-on-one interviews were conducted by Pat Boddy and Erin Skold.

Roundtable discussion was led by Pat Boddy and lasted approximately two hours.

Telephone interviews were conducted by Pat Boddy and Erin Skold.

Study Two: The Quantitative Study

- Goals:**
- 1) To determine the range and mix of offenses perpetrated by female juvenile offenders in Iowa;
 - 2) To identify the disposition of the female juvenile offenders' cases and services received; and
 - 3) To develop demographic data on the female juvenile offenders in Iowa and to begin to quantify their life situations and relationships.

Details: "Day-in-the-life" study of females in the juvenile court system.

Fax/mail survey of members of Coalition for Family and Children's Services of Iowa.

Method: The "day-in-the-life" study was accomplished by having each of Iowa's eight judicial districts pull a random sample of 50 cases from their total number of open cases involving female juveniles on April 1, 1997. The total number was then weighted based on the actual number of open cases for each judicial district.

A total of 37 (more than 50%) fax/mail surveys were returned by members of Coalition for Family and Children's Services of Iowa.

Surveys and questionnaires were designed, implemented, and analyzed by Pat Boddy and Erin Skold of Boddy Media Group. Dan Johnson, an independent contractor, provided assistance with tabulation on the juvenile court study.

FEMALE JUVENILE OFFENDERS STUDY EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

While no study is without its pitfalls, this has not been an easy project to complete. Confidentiality restrictions, limited data reporting, and many different ways of dealing with female juvenile offenders—both legal and social—complicate the research. However, with the “beyond the call of duty” efforts and cooperation of many groups and individuals within the juvenile justice system and the Iowa Department of Human Services, we feel this report is a solid representation of juvenile justice as it applies to females in the state of Iowa.

For the purposes of this report, we have attempted to look only at females in the system. While on occasion references may be made to male juvenile offenders, it is not our intent to compare girls to boys.

The story of these girls is told in their own words and those of the experts who work with them. Many of these experts say they are often frustrated in their work by a juvenile justice system that insists on treating all offenders alike. If they had their way, most say they would like to work in a system that recognizes the different needs of girls and boys—specifically, they say girls benefit from less emphasis on confrontation and more on relationship building. Many say they would like to take treatment to a more *individual* level, finding treatment that works on a per-girl basis.

Neglect and Abuse Start Early

Many of the young women interviewed as part of this research tell the same story—neglect and abuse usually starting at a very young age. Nearly all of these girls express moderate to heavy use of illegal drugs, with many saying their first exposure to drugs came through a parent or step parent. One respondent even mentions being ready to return home from a treatment facility only to have her hopes of leaving crushed by her mother’s failure to pass a drug test. Drugs aren’t the only problems these young women face. They also speak frequently of physical, verbal, and sexual abuse.

Intervention Comes Late

Intervention for both the abuse they experience at home and the trouble they get into away from home is late in coming for these young women. Several of these girls scoff at systems in place to protect them and society. One mentions turning to a school counselor for help. She notes that “you could get beat to death” before that option got you out of the home. With regard to the justice system, they say they might have learned their lessons sooner if the police and court system had taken their early offenses seriously.

These girls also say—and many experts agree—their parents could have done more to stop their delinquent behavior. As noted above with their first exposure to drugs, many say their parents

actively *participate* in their delinquent activities. Even if parents haven't participated, these girls say they allow delinquent behavior to continue through a loss of parental control. In much the same vein as loss of parental control, many speak of mothers (often the primary parental figure) who may not directly abuse but who allow abuse by other people (often a stepfather or live-in) to continue.

Skepticism Toward Programs

In addition to negative influence within their family and peer structure, many of the female juvenile offender respondents say they experience a general apathy with regard to the government sponsored treatment programs they enter once they do get in trouble. Some respondents say it may be just a generational thing, but they look at most government-run programs with a certain amount of skepticism and distrust. One or two even relate this to the conflicted authority figures they've had in their lives to-date (i.e., parental figures who give them drugs or abuse them). Many of the experts that work with these young women say this distrust often creates a barrier to the help the girls need.

Female Juveniles "Act In"

One of the few areas where it may be important to look at the difference between female and male juvenile offenders is "type" of crime. While girls have traditionally committed crimes which cause the most damage to themselves (i.e., self-mutilation, substance abuse, running away, suicide and attempted suicide), statistics show an increase in the number of young women committing violent crimes against others. Experts say some of this rise is likely pointing toward females' increased involvement in gangs. However, many say girls are simply learning to "handle" stress and are less likely to internalize the pressure they feel.

Sex and Parenthood Offer Promise and Problems

Sex and parenthood are usually not far from the minds of these female offenders. While none of the girls in these focus groups admitted to being pregnant, many had been pregnant and suffered miscarriages in recent years. Many made clear their desire to become parents— nearly all think they have what it takes to be good parents, regardless of their current situation (i.e., continuing drug use, lack of a home, financial need). In addition, while most demonstrate a *naïveté* of the dangers (sexually transmitted disease and emotional problems) related to their own sexual activity, few express concern.

And while most freely admit to sexual activity and a desire for children, few appear to have had healthy sexual relationships. As noted above, most speak of incest, early sexual abuse, and/or rape as part of their history.

Life Holds Little Value

This lack of concern for any of the above likely stems from a stated indifference to life itself. Many of these girls in these groups say they don't fear death— in fact, they say, they welcome death. Many speak of friends and family members who have died and say it often seems like a welcome relief.

Early Intervention, Social Activities, and Positive Role Models Spark Hope

The issues mentioned above, along with increasing numbers of “girl” gangs and a continuing tendency among girls to act out in more self-destructive ways, form the base of the problems which lead female juvenile offenders to treatment. Many of these girls say they might have avoided these problems altogether if they had had more positive activities when they were younger. They mention teen centers, jobs, and more positive teen and adult role models as ways they might have stayed out of trouble.

Relationship Building and Trust are Key

Once girls are in the system, new issues arise. Many of the experts interviewed for this report say building trust with the juvenile offender is key to successful treatment. However, they say they often encounter peers in the system who undervalue the importance of relationship building and the time it takes.

As noted above, trust is a big issue for the girls in these programs— they don’t trust the government, they often can’t trust their parents, and they don’t feel as if the staff at most of the facilities they’ve been in trust *them*. And that lack of trust in the system is not always unjustified for these young women. Many girls talk of being abused in the system— from the police officers they encounter to staff at the facilities where they’re placed.

Many experts agree that something is happening to these girls once they get in the system— whether it’s abuse by program staff or other juveniles, males and females alike. One expert goes so far as to say it seems as though the girls “have no heart” after they’ve been in the system for a while.

Gender Specific Programming is Needed

Many of these experts say they are reluctant to work with female offenders. They say it is just too *hard*. While some say girls tend to have problems that *snowball*, the likely problem is that all the research they have access to is centered on male juveniles and it just isn’t easy to apply that knowledge to girls. These experts are nearly universal in their desire for treatment options that acknowledge the differences between female and male juvenile offenders.

These girls and the experts that work with them agree that models which emphasize confrontation and de-emphasize— even prohibit— relationship building just don’t work with most girls. Some experts go so far as to say they’re not sure if they work with *boys* either.

On that point, it should be noted that for all the support these experts express for gender-specific treatment options, what they say they really want is *individualized* programming that allows them to take into consideration each girl’s past history and personality. Some experts even say this approach would end up benefiting *all* juvenile offenders. They indicate boys also suffer from being made to fit the “square hole” of current research and programming.

Education Takes on New Importance for Young Women in Placement

Many of these girls say they have found renewed pleasure in learning while in placement. Experts say there are likely several reasons for this. They say before placement, school was probably the most restrictive environment these girls experienced. It is likely now the least restrictive part of their day. In addition, many of these girls were relatively poor students due to their social and family situations, but with the added structure placement offers, many experience academic success for the first time in their lives. That success frequently translates to a much higher level of self-esteem.

Detention Center Experts Wrestle with Their Own Issues

Overcrowding is more of a problem in some facilities than it is in others. For those facilities with limited space, these experts see real consequences for female offenders. They say young women are often turned away from their facilities and/or end up in inappropriate treatment programs where space is available.

Many experts say girls are often held at facilities for a wider variety of reasons than boys. For example, they say, a young woman might be held for her own protection, especially if there is suspected gang activity. Often, this means that girls who are being held for violent offenses might be in the same facility— even in close proximity— to a girl who has committed a non-violent offense or even no offense at all.

Manipulation is Often the Name-of-the-Game When Getting Out

“Fake it ‘til you make it” and “front your way out” are phrases often heard in conversations with these young women. Many say they plan to go back to their old ways when they leave. They say they know all the tricks— from passing a urine test to fooling their counselors— and plan to use them to get out of treatment.

And some experts say it’s downright easy for the girls to go back to their old ways as there is no structure in place for follow-up. They say for the most part once the decision is made to let a girl go, there is little they can do to monitor her family, social, and educational environment. And once a girl reaches the age of eighteen— she’s out of the system altogether. For this reason, many of these experts express a desire for a treatment structure that allows them to follow up with offenders when they leave the system.

FEMALE JUVENILE OFFENDERS STUDY

REPORT OF FINDINGS

I. INTRODUCTION

On April 1, 1997, Chief Juvenile Court Officers report 1743 open cases involving females under the age of 18. What brings our girls to the juvenile justice system? What services might aid in prevention and/or recidivism? In what ways does the system now serve these girls? And how well? How might juvenile justice better meet the needs of these girls?

These represent just a few of the hard questions facing the juvenile justice system as it begins to address its increasingly female population. This report starts to look at these issues as it outlines the results of two separate but compatible studies:

- 1) A quantitative assessment to clarify where girls are in the system, the services they receive, and the crimes that put their names in the case books; and
- 2) A qualitative assessment— a series of focus groups, interviews, and a roundtable discussion with experts— to enrich our understanding of the cold facts and better appreciate the impact of the system on these girls.

As you read this report, please bear in mind:

- This report has purposely not been structured to pit girls against boys. While some comparison to the services boys receive is at times necessary to illustrate a point, this is not an equity study. The question answered here is not how does the system serve girls compared to boys, but instead, how does the system serve girls?
- At many points throughout the study confidentiality has been promised to assure the trust of respondents and/or comply with requirements of the juvenile justice system. Typically, individuals and institutions will not be identified by name. "About the Studies," however, will demonstrate the range of individuals and institutions contacted for input.
- No easy data collection system exists. This study has used the best scientific methods available given the constraints of current reporting systems— but we face serious constraints. If it were not for the full and enthusiastic cooperation of many individuals and groups within the juvenile justice system and the Iowa Department of Human Services, no quantitative assessment would have been possible.
- As it stands, much of this quantitative data underscores themes described by

experts and girls participating in this study, but due to changing data collection methods and/or small sample sizes ("n") the trends identified in the data cannot always be considered statistically significant. When coupled with the experts' interpretations and perceptions, however, this data tells a compelling story of the female juvenile offender's struggle.

- ✕ – Indicates quotes from experts within the system
- ✓ – Indicates quotes from juveniles within the system

II. WHAT LEADS THEM INTO THE SYSTEM . . .

A. ABUSE AND FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

Both experts and girls report abuse as a frequent problem facing female juvenile offenders.

Nearly all of the girls participating in this research say they were victims, or witnesses of past verbal, physical, or sexual abuse— often in combination. They speak of abuse from parents, other relatives, and boyfriends.

- ✓ *My stepfather gave me drugs when I was six*
- ✓ *My parents have been reported repeatedly for child abuse. When I was fourteen I finally got taken out of the home. I didn't go through the schools. You know, how they say go to the school counselor? It's kind of screwed because they don't get you out of the house right away. You could get beat to death before they even get there.*
- ✓ *My family neglected me and my mom was using drugs. . . . The next-door neighbors called the cops because there weren't a very adults home. They came and took us away because it wasn't a stable home and there weren't a very adults.*
- ✓ *Rape? I was raped three times. You'd end up here if you killed them.*
- ✓ *When I got done with court they said I could go home . . . but my mom tested positive for cocaine, so I couldn't go home, I had to come here . . . they said I had to stay here until I was 18.*
- ✓ *I think the environment that the kids grow up in, like, abusive or drugs all over the place, it's not healthy because they grow up to think it's okay and they do it themselves. Parents do think it's sad to have their children taken away, but it's sad to have them grow up that way.*

Mothers may not always be the abusers, but they often stand by while abuse continues.

Many of these young women mention mothers who appear to be victims themselves. Often these girls come from single parent homes where the mother is the primary parent. These girls speak of stepfathers and boyfriends who have beaten and raped them and supplied them with drugs (in some cases, as noted above, even forcing them into their first experience with drugs at a very young age). Often these girls express sympathy for a mother they view as relatively helpless.

- ✓ *She [mother] deserves better than she got– a messed up kid that ain't worth nothin' and a husband that beats the shit out of her every day.*
- ✗ *It starts out with some family problems, but a high number of the girls have been abused physically, sexually, whatever and the role modeling in the family hasn't been particularly good. So what happens is they kind of do what they saw mom do.*
- ✓ *I don't know how I got into the system. My mom got remarried. It's my mom's fifth time. I don't like it because I've never met my biological father.*

Parents and family are often implicated as contributors or influences to delinquent behavior. Female juvenile offenders say parents contribute to delinquent behavior in two ways. They say parents lose control of their children and any disciplinary authority over them, or that parents can also become active participants in the delinquent behavior.

- ✓ *The first time I had a joint my stepfather gave it to me, so he was a negative support system.*
- ✓ *I was in rehab. On my home visit me and my mom were using [drugs] together.*
- ✓ *We don't listen to our parents anymore. Parents can't discipline their kids anymore.*
- ✓ *I think a lot of parents aren't caring anymore, either. They don't check where you work. I got jobs at places by using my sister's I.D. I don't even look 18.*

Many detention center directors attribute delinquent behavior to home environment as well. Environment, especially family, has the biggest influence on delinquent behavior according to directors. They attribute this to the type of role models and levels of responsibility in the girls' home environment.

- ✗ *I think a lot of that just comes from parenting. As long as they go back to the same environment, things won't really change.*

- ✖ *[It's a] universal problem as far as I'm concerned— I see kids with no family life. When we do an intake on a kid and we ask about mother, father and siblings, the kid doesn't know who father is. No structured home life. There may be 5 or 6 different last names on siblings. No stable home life. I've had girls, both boys and girls tell me, being locked up in here is the best they've ever had it.*
- ✖ *I believe that both the males and females [would benefit by having] a family that's together. Father, mother and siblings together for a ten year span any more is almost quite an accomplishment. I place a lot on the family. Everybody has problems and that— but when it comes to your children. . .*
- ✖ *Not real good role models. They are coming from places where they have been abused both physically and sexually. Behavior may be condoned that is not acceptable.*

B. SLOW RECOGNITION OF TROUBLED GIRLS/INWARD ACTS OF RAGE

Experts and juveniles alike say that intervention does not come soon enough for females.

Female juvenile delinquents in these focus groups say that they are not taken seriously by law enforcement. They say police officers and courts are more likely to give a female a "second, third, or fourth chance." Girls say families as well tend to treat troubled daughters differently than they do troubled sons. Some girls say they know that they can manipulate some authorities in the system.

- ✓ *The cops that I've had experience with crack down harder on guys but play off women like a joke.*
- ✓ *My parents never thought guys were more masculine, but they thought my brother was doing so well and I wasn't.*
- ✓ *If you get a cute young [officer] you can manipulate, it's a lot easier. But if you get one of those old people, they're hard to manipulate. I know I've been laughed at by cops, and they treat gang people with no respect at all, especially the girl [gang members].*
- ✓ *[I've been treated differently as a girl] by the cops. Two extremes: some of them treat you like this innocent little fragile thing, and others think I'm like a animal.*
- ✓ *[My parents] gave more to my brother, so, since they didn't pay attention to me, I just thought I'd go out and do something to get their attention. That still didn't work.*

- ✓ *The first time I was in a police car I got caught stealing and I ran out of the store and the paddy wagon came up behind me. . . . They called our parents and actually dropped me off at my friend's house. I think they didn't really care. I mean, I think they cared, but I think they view that as a little bitty thing, you know, no big deal, we'll let them go this time. We'll catch her when it gets worse [sic].*
- ✓ *My dad is Hispanic, so to him, men are superior to women. I'd test that by doing everything my brother did. I got in trouble, but he didn't.*

The experts agree with the girls. They say that females are often overlooked and by the time they receive services the damage is already extensive. They also say that some girls will take advantage of the idea that many are uncomfortable with females in the juvenile justice system and manipulate staff.

- ✗ *[The average female delinquent] probably doesn't have a history [within the system]. A lot of things are overlooked until law violation. There is a paternal attitude toward girls. When girls get to court they cry and that makes the judge uncomfortable, so they do a lot of informal kinds of things. There is an attempt at service, but it isn't focused at what is needed, it's focused at what will take care of that uncomfortable feeling of a girl's being in the system.*
- ✗ *A lot of these girls get these things by manipulation and there are a lot of times they don't realize what they're doing and then sometimes, they do [realize].*
- ✗ *Lots of [program directors] say they just aren't getting girls. We used to use this [program] as a step after a more structured program to get them back into the community [prior to delinquency]. Now they aren't intervening until they are delinquent.*
- ✗ *I'll be real honest; I think it's jurisdiction. I think there are some places where they may be softer on females.*
- ✗ *I've seen some girls do some real interesting things and still not receive any treatment.*
- ✗ *Girls are getting overlooked very much so. The status offenses aren't even looked at anymore. We need them to be at least statistically courted for us to get a hold of them.*
- ✗ *Intervene earlier with the girls. See that they get all of the services boys get.*

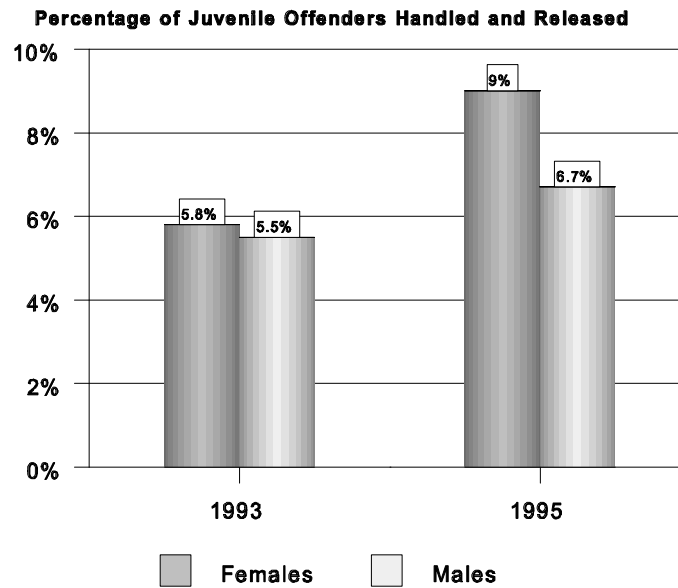


Chart Note Handled and released means "released to parents, released with warning, etc." In 1993, 109 females and 390 males were handled and released. In 1995 that number jumped to 236 for females and 592 for males. What is alarming about these figures is the indication that girls are increasingly getting sent on their way and less intervention is taking place. They are not getting as many services when they are being handled and released.

Interpretation/Analysis Girls behave differently than boys and the juvenile justice system is oftentimes running on a model designed to serve boys. The symptoms of a girl in trouble are different from those of a boy in trouble. The girls are getting overlooked. Also, those in authority are less likely to be able to recognize that the girl appearing in their court may be just as violent and dangerous as the boy. This girl may be standing before the judge crying and the judge has not been trained to interpret these behaviors in any context other than a stereotypical male model where tears are considered a sign of weakness.

Girls deal with their problems differently than boys. Experts say that these girls allow their troubles to build up and snowball. Boys act on any problems they are facing (whether positively or negatively) and the issue is resolved. Experts say the system works by this male model as well. It deals with one problem and then skips to the next. Experts say girls need a different approach that builds on any progress made on a given issue as they deal with other issues.

- ✖ *I think that our systems tend to be situational intervention based on the male model. Problem situation intervene, take care of it. With girls we need more of a proactive continuum approach. You start here and you follow. If we had a worker that followed the girl [through] the whole program . . .*
- ✖ *Girls snowball their problems. Boys have the issues, the behavior, and move on. Girls snowball because of the way they deal with or cope with their problems.*

Interpretation/Analysis Girls' problems have a "snowball" effect because girls act inward. Their release or way of dealing with their problems is often self-destructive— this ends up causing them more problems— or produces the snowball effect. When experts are dealing with problems with female offenders they need to acknowledge that as one problem is exposed, the cause of it is most likely another problem still hidden.

C. GENERATIONAL AND SOCIETAL VALUES

Generational values influence youth and contribute to the growth in delinquency. The juveniles of this study imply their generation experiences a general apathy towards government and the system in general. Any program run by the government is initially regarded with suspicion and distrust. In specifically dealing with the juvenile justice system, these girls don't trust it and have no hope that it will ever change. Many say that the system has failed them thus far and will only continue to, so they want nothing to do with it.

- ✓ *You know what makes me mad, that I'm sitting here thinking about? You know, we've been talking for quite a while, and I know you [moderator] have nothing to do with it, but all they're going to do is just use this for statistics and say that they attempted to do something because they came out and talked to us, but nothing's going to change.*
- ✓ *There's more anger because of the way the government runs and the way people do things that they're not supposed to do and contradict themselves. They tell us to do one thing and they do just the opposite.*
- ✓ *They show these sports people . . . then they find out their off-duty ways. . . . They get paid ridiculous amounts of money to sit up there and smile and say they care about the kids when they really don't. Like the D.A.R.E. officer who got caught selling drugs.*
- ✓ *I think that all authority figures around us are contradicted and when you're a child you do look up to people. Even some police use drugs. That's ridiculous.*

- ✓ *I think we're angry because people are talking about what a sad state this country is in, how things need to change, but it's all talk and they don't put the money into the programs. It's not just about putting more [money] into police, it's about stopping the problem before it even becomes one.*

Interpretation/Analysis For these girls, this apathetic attitude toward the government and its authority may be nullifying any government messages about prevention, such as offered by D.A.R.E. or the "Just Say No" campaign. Perhaps the same messages would be more effective if they were to come from different sources. Local community members could probably function better as the source. Community members could establish some sort of relationship with youth which would enable kids to put more trust in the messengers and messages themselves. As for the juvenile justice system, it must establish some trust with these girls in order to get their attention.

Society and social pressures contribute to the problems of these girls. Many experts in this study feel that the high incidence of male dependency issues among female juvenile offenders can be attributed to societal pressures. They say that girls who develop negative self images have those images constantly reinforced by the media, peers, and respected adults and consequently these girls actively seek acceptance. The stigma attached to those participating in delinquent behavior is much more negative for females, experts say. Furthermore, they say girls who commit crimes are not taken as seriously as boys who commit crimes, leaving them with a reinforced sense of inability and failure—essentially boys are even better at "screwing up" than girls are. Some say that girls feel as if they don't belong and are searching for a place to fit in a "man's world."

- ✕ *That should be a rather label: all of our girls are 'male-dependent' instead of looking at the bigger picture that says that we taught them that women have to have a boyfriend. They didn't just decide that they have to have a man, we taught them that. It's society.*
- ✓ *Females are supposed to be proper, so it [looks] worse to society [when a girl gets in trouble].*
- ✕ *I believe strongly in advocacy for young women. For example, in Sioux City there are billboards all over saying, "The one she's shacking up with isn't the sperm donor."*
- ✕ *She may just want to be accepted somewhere.*
- ✓ *[Police] look at it like, "What could girls do?"*

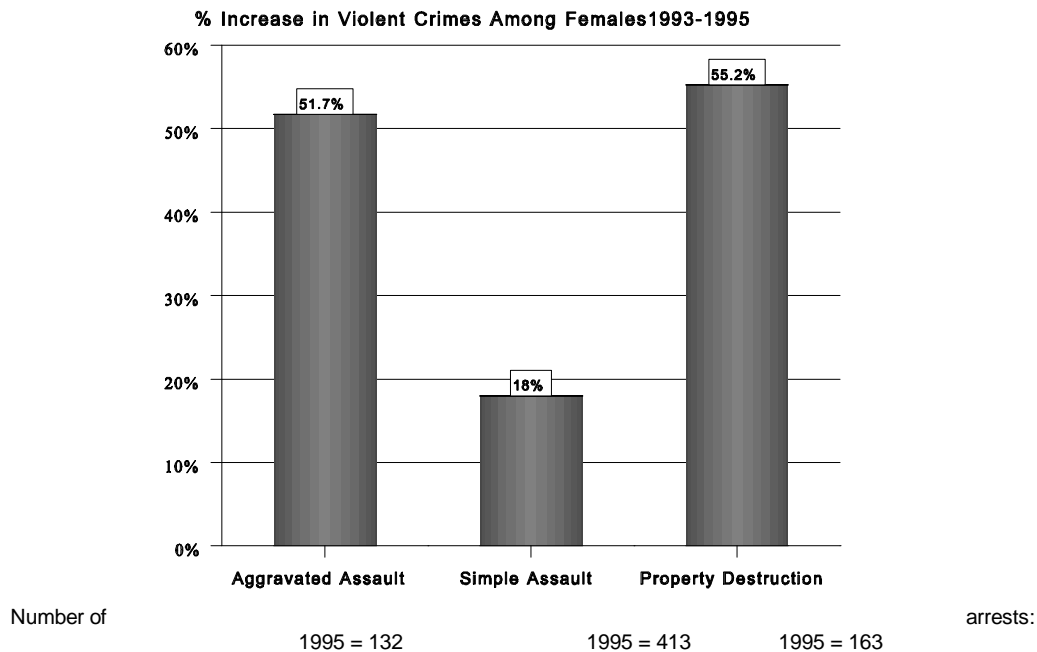
- ✱ *Instead of making a girl make it in a man's world, we need to help them know that doing things in a woman's way is okay.*
- ✱ *You need to focus on the community. You need to start building as early as kindergarten, building self-esteem, self control. You need to focus on the parents, the neighbors, and the community as a whole.*

D. THE STRUGGLE FOR ATTENTION

While girls initially tend to act more inward, they are getting more external in their delinquency. Experts cite many different reasons that may contribute to this. Some say that these girls are becoming "healthier" in their ability to deal with stress and pressures. Others feel that boys, particularly gang members, are now recruiting girls to get involved because they feel that girls can get through the system easier. Still others say that girls try the inward behavior first, and when they don't get the attention and help they need, they are forced to act out to get the system's attention.

- ✱ *I think it's more healthy. The internalizing is so self-destructive. At least now, she's getting the feelings out. . . . Not as healthy for the community, but for the girl herself.*
- ✱ *Some research suggests that the girls are doing more of the boy's dirty work— the stealing, a assault. Because girls are not treated the same as boys in the system, they might get away with it.*
- ✱ *In our work with gangs, that's [see above quote] what we've found. The initiation is more different [sic].*
- ✱ *I think we are not meeting their needs. When they are hurting themselves, we pat them on the head and send them home. They have to do something to get our attention.*

Interpretation/Analysis Girls' initial inwardly oriented behavior is possibly a reflection of their way of handling societal pressures placed on women. Often women feel pressured to be the nurturer and are oriented towards taking care of others. They are not used to seeking help and are unfamiliar with attention-getting behavior, or outwardly oriented behavior. Thus, when faced with their own problems, they will direct frustrations inward. Many professionals in the system are not trained to recognize this behavior and are not looking for the warning signs. While the more aggressive boys are getting the attention and services they need, some girls are beginning to see this and in turn are beginning to be more aggressive as well, in hopes that they, too, will be noticed. (See chart following regarding rise in violent crime.)



Female juvenile delinquents seem to struggle with sexual responsibility more than other groups. The girls speak of pregnancy and miscarriages with a alarming frequency. While no girl involved in these focus groups is known to be pregnant, many say they had been and miscarried because of drug use or physical violence, and at least one respondent does have a child at home. Even when they say they are aware of such issues as birth control, protection from STDs (sexually transmitted diseases), prenatal care, and the responsibilities of parenting—it does not seem to make any difference in their behavior, including those who say they have been treated for STDs or pregnant multiple times. In fact, many say they would like to have babies.

- ✓ *I just feel like I can handle responsibility and I'd like to do that.*
- ✓ *And I know that I would pick the right father that would stick with it.*
- ✓ *It will help me because it will keep me away from those people [negative influences], keep me occupied.*
- ✓ *All my friends have babies. They sniff paint and they're all doing good.*
- ✓ *My relationships that are most important to me are my boyfriend and my baby. I haven't seen my baby in seven months. I was at home when I had the baby. The baby is with my mom.*

- ✓ *I don't know – I know my mom did crack, but I was healthy, I was fat [as a baby]!*

Pregnancy, prenatal care, and parenting are bigger issues in some areas of Iowa than others, detention center directors say. While some directors report that maternity issues are not a problem in their facilities, others say it's a definite problem. At some facilities girls are given tests if the girls suspect they are pregnant. If a girl is indeed pregnant, directors say that it is then time to start considering diet, substance abuse issues, prenatal care, family reaction and mother/child bonding. Some directors report that it can affect the way staff interacts with the girls.

- ✗ *I've been here since this facility started 8 years ago, and we've only had one young lady who was actually past her trimester. We had some who tested positive, but they were still in their first trimester. And that's in a seven year span. And we have a lot of them who come in who say they think they're pregnant.*
- ✗ *Unfortunately the pregnant girls are still substance abusers and are receiving very little prenatal [care].*
- ✗ *These kids aren't healthy when we get them, but where prenatal care is concerned, we prioritize that and they get vitamins, and that information follows them wherever they go. We've had quite a few who are pregnant – if they need a special diet, or if they need to rest more . . .*
- ✗ *I think [pregnancy] makes the staff feel pretty uncomfortable. I've really worked with them to not be such a jailer type person. We have a lot of our staff who will talk to our girls about that. I think they're taken care of here in that respect, and they're allowed to be pregnant and talk about it.*
- ✗ *And we usually do some assessment of how the family is reacting and give that information to the courts, because if the family looks at this girl as a slut, we try to let the judge know.*
- ✗ *We have allowed visitation [with the baby]. We don't want to disrupt any bonding, so she was allowed special time, not regular visitation. Regular visitation is too yucky. And at the same time, we don't want this girl to be holding her baby, and [it is making] everybody else jealous.*
- ✗ *A lot of the girls when first brought in say they might be pregnant and have sexually transmitted diseases. We test them so we could start them on prenatal care.*

- ✖ *When we talk about male dependency, we are asked to come in and do a 'booster shot,' assuming that these young people know [about sexuality, but] one of the first things I learned was that just because a fourteen-year-old has had a baby, don't assume that she knows where her cervix is.*

Interpretation/Analysis The lack of sexual responsibility is another way in which girls can damage themselves that may not be obvious to authorities. These girls may use sex as a tool in their search for security. If the boy doesn't provide them with this sense of security, then maybe they will get pregnant and the baby will provide it for them. Some also see a baby as one way to keep them out of trouble by forcing them into a more responsible role. This willingness to take risks with their bodies and have their own babies is likely another example of these girls searching for someone to love them and someone they can trust— or maybe for someone to just take notice.

Some of these female juvenile delinquents say they see no good reason to live. Some of these girls say they have either attempted suicide or are considered at risk for attempting suicide. When questioned about this, several say they can simply see no reason to live. Some take it even further and say that committing suicide would be doing a favor for parents or others in their lives. Even when reasons for living are suggested, these girls say they are unable to accept them.

- ✓ *If you would just die, sooner or later, time would heal all wounds.*
- ✓ *They'd [relatives and friends] realize that they'd see you again because they will die someday too.*
- ✖ *In general we see a lot of suicidal behavior especially in the runaway unit. They do lots of unhealthy behaviors.*
- ✓ *Staying alive and seeing all the pain I've put people through— It would be easier to end my life and have them go through the pain quick.*
- ✓ *[Death is] real for me. I will lay dead in that casket, as dead as dead can be.*
- ✓ *That was the worst day of my life, being born. Give me a gun I'll just do it.*

E. CRIMINAL INVOLVEMENT THROUGH GANGS, DRUGS, AND TECHNOLOGY

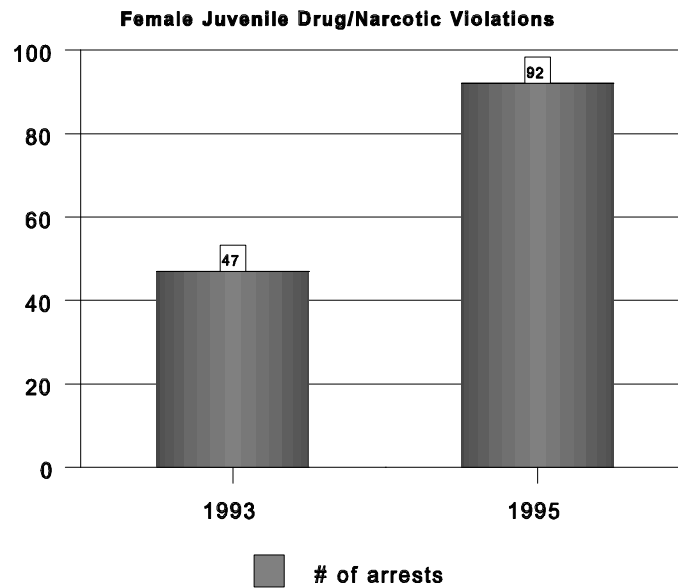
Many report a rise in gang activity, particularly among females, and its role in the growing crime rates. Gang involvement could lead to serious problems for girls. Experts participating in this survey say girls are often used to transport drugs, weapons, or other contraband because

the male members feel that the system is easier on girls. Getting into a gang for a girl can often mean further destruction of sexually responsible practices, say respondents in this study. Girls can neither fight their way in or get "sexed in" where they have sex with 4-5 male members. Getting girls out of gangs may prove to be more challenging even than getting boys out because of the high value girls place on relationships and bonds.

- ✖ *The real increase with females are involvement in gangs. Violent crimes . . . a lot of this increase is due to a relationship. [Also] females are getting a sense of power. If they're not fighting with the males, they have their own female gangs.*
- ✓ *My gang [was my support system]. They were there to back me up on the outs. I didn't have to worry about someone jumping on my back because they were always there.*
- ✖ *We have a young lady in here right now for robbery second. We have a rother in for heavy gang involvement with serious crimes against persons in the past.*
- ✓ *I always wanted to be involved in a gang.*
- ✖ *They are more involved in gang activities. Unfortunately this involves an increase in sexual activity. This is how they jump in. They have to have sex with 4-5 members. We have seen an increase in females that are being detained that are pregnant. We see a higher amount of females who come in with STDs (sexually transmitted diseases). I would say this is true with the guys too, but more so with the females.*
- ✓ *I'm sixteen and I'm here for gang involvement, car theft, and second degree robbery.*

Interpretation/Analysis The self destructive behaviors discussed above are more likely to be positively reinforced by gangs. Sexual promiscuity can get girls into a group that they say will provide them with some of the security and sense of belonging that they so desperately want. Other behaviors such as substance abuse and criminal activity may also be reinforced in the gangs. Despite the negatives of gangs, they are providing these girls with a sense of security that the system, community, and society as a whole have not offered. There is likely a need to identify the attractive elements of gang life, such as protection, security and a sense of belonging, and help girls find other ways to meet those needs.

While nearly all the girls have used drugs, attitudes about drug use vary. Female juvenile delinquents in this study report an extremely high rate of drug use. The drugs they talk about range from alcohol and marijuana to acid and crack. While some of the girls say they still have an interest in using drugs, others say they are afraid of using again. Some aren't sure.



- ✓ *I know I am [going to use drugs]. The first day I get out.*
- ✓ *That's what I'm gonna do.*
- ✓ *I don't think– I might– I don't want to– I might.*
- ✓ *Stay in my room all day and get high.*
- ✓ *You're not going to have fun! You're going to get addicted. You're gonna die from it!*
- ✓ *I still fear using drugs, even though right now I'm mad at the drugs. It will be a lifelong thing with me.*
- ✓ *My fear is doing drugs, friends, you know.*

Interpretation/Analysis The varying attitudes towards drugs are most likely due to different levels in progress within drug treatment programs. While many girls are not ready to give up drugs, others understand their destructiveness, and still others are realistic about the dangers of addicts slipping back into old habits.

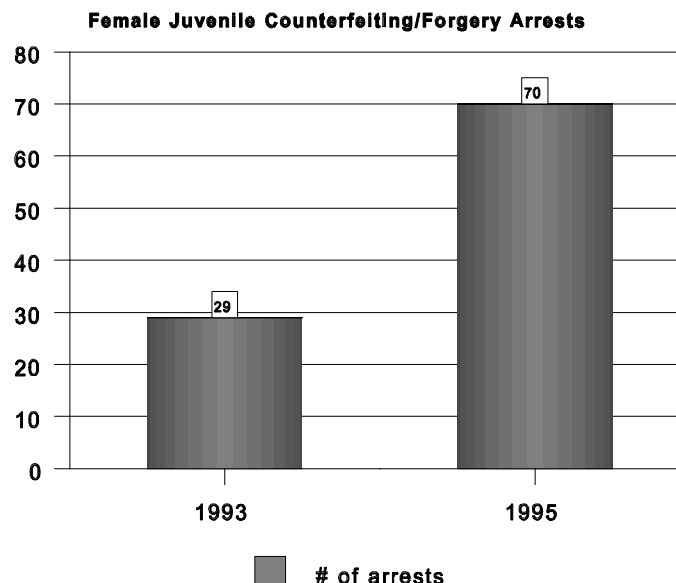
Some detention center directors report a rise in violent crime among females— others say no. Those who believe that there is a rise attribute this to an increase in gang related activities and a sense of competition with the boys. Others say that girls are becoming more violent because of situations at home.

- ✖ *Females are becoming, or some of the girls we are dealing with are trying to be more delinquent, trying to be more like the boys. It's more of a challenge— to be hard, to be seasoned.*
- ✖ *[Compared to five years ago girls are] a lot more aggressive. A lot more independent. A lot of them have to be, because of their home lives, are they committing more serious crimes? I wouldn't say that.*
- ✖ *Girls are starting to get more involved in the public safety issue. Communities are perceiving girls as potentially [dangerous]. That's beginning to be more of a factor.*

Interpretation/Analysis Though we cannot claim statistical significance because of the numbers of girls we are dealing with, the numerical data does underscore the general attitudes of the experts based on their comments and statements. (See chart above comparing violent crime arrests.)

Female juvenile offenders report that technological advances have sparked delinquent activity. They say that technology has enabled juveniles to have easier access to sophisticated weaponry and this makes it easier to commit fraud and access bank accounts. Detention center directors report an increase of fraud and similar offenses.

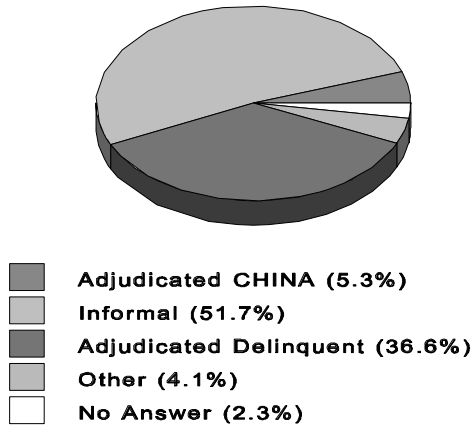
- ✓ *High technology has developed high-tech drugs and weapons.*
- ✓ *And you can get social security numbers, credit card numbers . . .*
- ✖ *There are more property crimes, misuse of credit card type of offenses.*



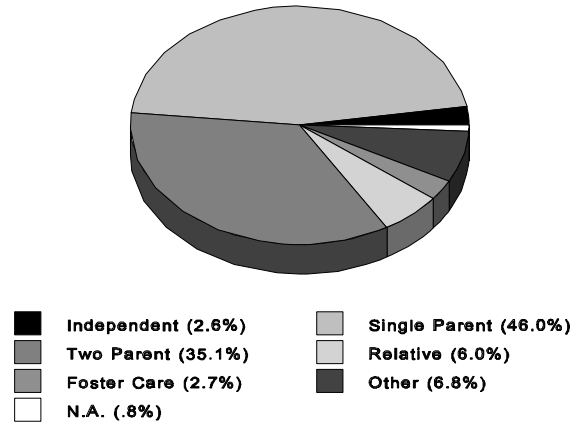
III. WHO THESE GIRLS ARE . . .

Who are these girls? The following series of charts shows some of the different demographic characteristics of Iowa's female juvenile delinquent population as of April 1, 1997. The data was collected from eight judicial districts representing 99 counties.

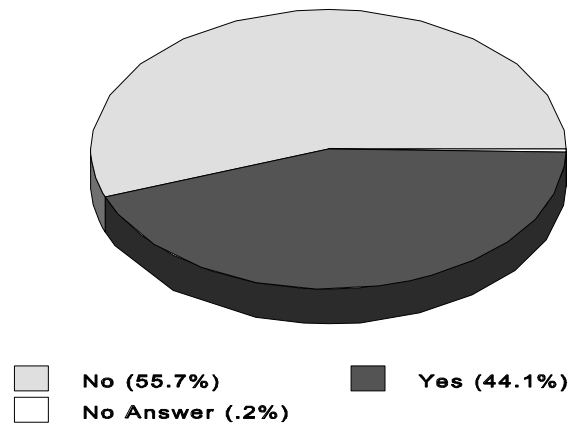
Juvenile's Current Status



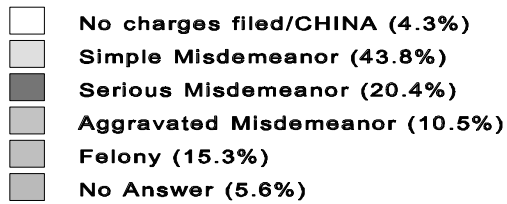
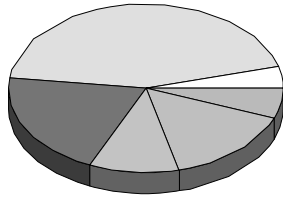
Juvenile's Home Situation



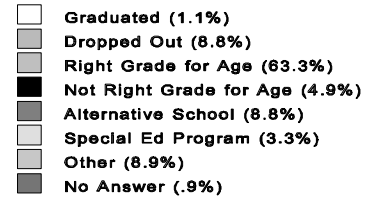
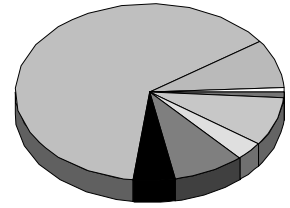
Any prior referrals?



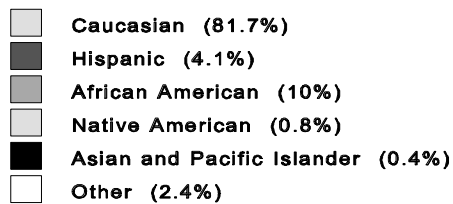
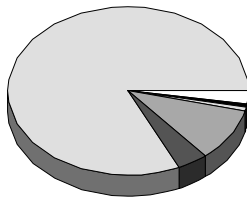
Class of Current Offense



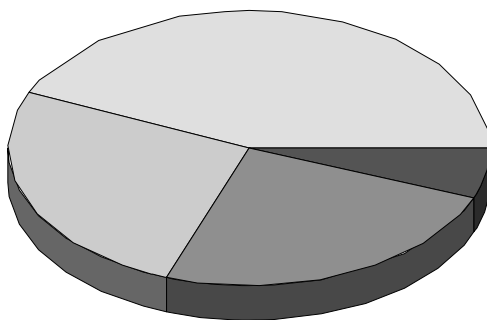
Juvenile's Status in School



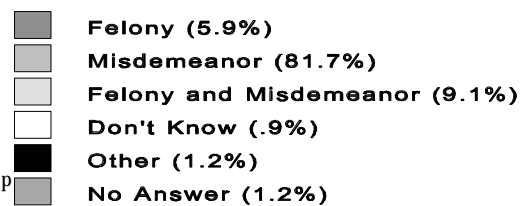
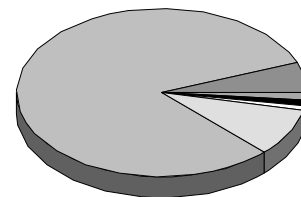
Juvenile's Ethnic Breakdown



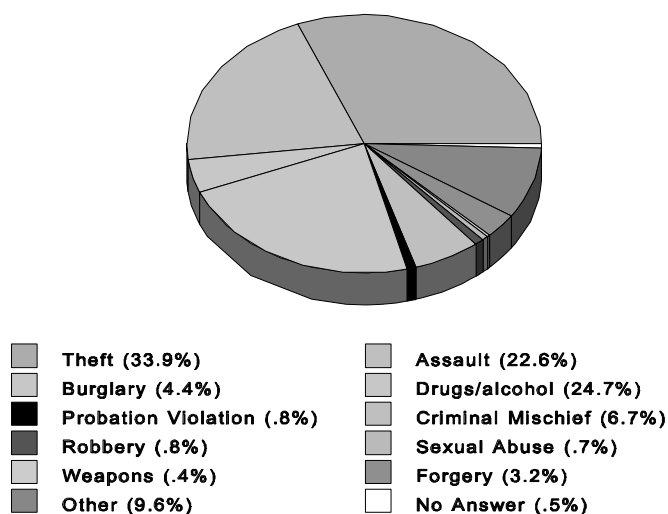
of Prior Referrals



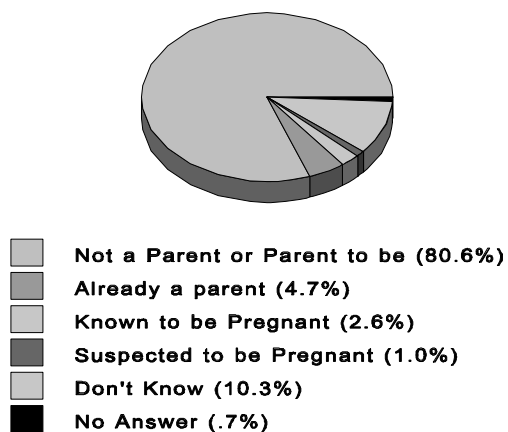
Nature of Prior Referral



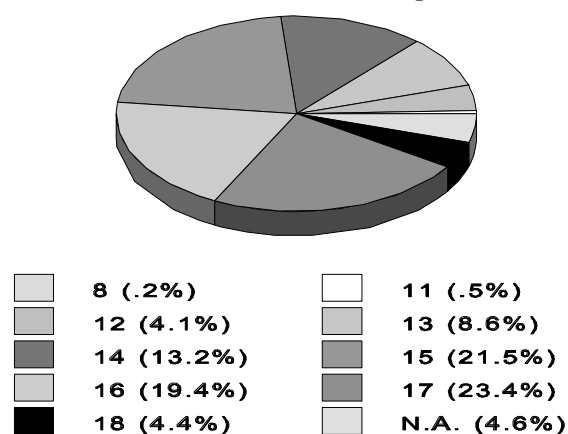
Current Offense



Juvenile's Parenting Status



Juvenile's Age



IV. PREVENTING GIRLS FROM GETTING INTO THE SYSTEM . . .

A. RECOGNIZING INWARD ACTS— EARLY

Experts say the differences between male and female juvenile delinquents are evident in their behaviors. The most commonly mentioned behavioral difference the experts note is the tendency for girls to act inward and boys to act outward. The experts participating in this study say when a girl is having problems or is "at risk," she tends to hurt herself first— she may develop eating disorders, become suicidal, participate in substance abuse, engage in unhealthy sexual practices, or run away, among other things. According to these experts, with appropriate training and program development, those involved in the system could recognize and deal with these issues more effectively.

- ✱ *Girls act in and boys act out.*
- ✱ *Girls hurt themselves and boys hurt others.*
- ✱ *We are looking at early intervention in the grade school. When they are looking for at-risk kids, they are looking at behaviors that are generic for boys. When I ask about kids who are depressed or tired, none of these things are on this list in this 'innovative' new program.*
- ✱ *Obviously boys tend to act out more. A lot of the girls [direct their behavior] more internally and it's not always noticed because it's not affecting others, just themselves.*
- ✱ *Your ladies are . . . still acting inward a lot more than the outward delinquency stuff.*

Interpretation/Analysis This research indicates recognizing these behaviors needs to start before the girls ever get to the juvenile justice system. Programs that work with teachers to help them recognize children that are "at risk" should make sure that their programs are training educators to recognize these more subtle, but just as serious, "at risk" behaviors. The implication would be, all programs that work with youth should be aware of these differences, but schools are a good place to start because of their close contact with students.

B. OFFERING LOCAL ACTIVITIES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Girls participating in this research identify teen centers and jobs as means for preventing delinquent behaviors. These girls say that if there were more activities for teenagers they would have less free time and probably not have gotten in as much trouble. They also say that jobs could have helped occupy their time and given them a sense of responsibility.

- ✓ *I had a job, so I could work that off when I was at my job.*
- ✓ *If we had more places that your teenagers can go to have fun or make some money.*
- ✓ *We need more stuff for us to do. The only things there is for us to do is skating, the 'Y', bowling . . .*
- ✓ *I think kids should be more involved in school, just stuff that will keep you busy, stuff that will make you feel better about who you are, like if you try out for cheerleading and you make it you'll feel better.*

Interpretation/Analysis With research indicating juveniles desire more activities and responsibilities, again an opportunity for the community to step in arises. According to this research, community members should consider what kind of activities they offer local teenagers and whether there is a legitimate need for more recreational and entertainment for youth. Efforts to motivate students to value school and work (through school-to-work initiatives, for example) could help these girls locate job opportunities within their communities before they get into trouble.

V. ONCE GIRLS ARE IN THE SYSTEM . . .

A. BUILDING TRUST AND RELATIONSHIPS

Building relationships with female juvenile delinquents is imperative to providing successful services, say experts. These experts say that a relationship and certain level of trust established between female juvenile delinquents and those who work with them is the first step to a successful treatment program. They also say that frustrations arise when others in the system cannot see the importance of establishing a relationship and understand the time that this can take.

- ✗ *You have to have a relationship first.*
- ✗ *Instead of the system saying that she has to be in school every week, rather than take into consideration that we've made progress in a relationship with her.*
- ✗ *The inability to trust has become a huge issue for these girls.*
- ✗ *We try to focus on developing relationships with them right off the bat. We can understand interactions with authority more instead of rebelling against them.*

- ✖ *With girls, the relationship is so important, and by the time we develop the relationship, we need to transition them out.*

Girls also say that relationships are important. Female offenders participating in this study say that strong relationships make their treatment more successful. They frequently speak of their inability to trust staff members. These offenders say this trust is violated when staff members openly talk about the girls in front of others or in front of a girl as if she is not there. They say that peers are more likely to care about them than staff. Many of these girls say they resent staff because they can't trust them.

- ✓ *You can be more independent [at this facility] . . . they treated you like part of their family. You could tell them anything and they wouldn't treat you like that was bad. All the other places were like, "Well you gotta do this or else."*
- ✓ *Sometimes I don't need counseling, I just need someone to listen*
- ✓ *You can't hug each other and I think we need to hug each other. When someone's really hurt, like me and [another girl] were in a program before and now we can't even touch each other.*
- ✓ *We need friends. We don't need somebody who's going to downgrade us. We already have problems. . . . It makes us torn up inside. . . . It's like, we hold all this stuff in because we can't even talk about nothing because we don't even know these people!*
- ✓ *And they tell us that we can't talk about each other, but they [staff] talk about different stuff right in front of us.*
- ✓ *And [talking about us] really hurts our feelings. . . . They act like we don't have no feelings, either.*
- ✓ *One of the staff members was asking our residential coordinator if she'd seen my grievance, and she said, "Yeah, and it makes me almost want to laugh." It made me feel bad, thinkin', there's no point in even doin' that.*
- ✓ *[What would really work is] people that really care— no phories.*
- ✓ *[What works is] people who actually take the time to listen to you.*
- ✓ *Yeah, if you open up to your advocates, that's supposed to be between you two . . . and they end up writing it down on paper.*
- ✓ *Physical contact is a way of healing and feeling support.*

- ✓ *Trust. They got to trust us. I understand that there are a lot of people who just don't deserve it. But I think you got to give it [trust] to them and then if they break it then you say, "Hey, now we got to back up."*
- ✓ *Or like the other staff will say something about it . . . you know it will accidentally slip . . . or they write it down in a book.*
- ✓ *That's why I don't tell them nothing. I know they talk, back in the office. I know they talk to each other. That's why I'm cautious about what I'm going to say to them. You just don't want anybody else knowing. It's like . . . there goes your feelings.*
- ✓ *It's trust. You lose your trust with somebody.*
- ✓ *They gave me a [disciplinary] sheet for holding [another girl's] hand when it was a tornado drill. It was really scary!*
- ✓ *I've heard staff talk about people out loud.*
- ✓ *When you ask for a time-out staff sits right there and tears you down*
- ✓ *I don't think they care. I know they say they do, but . . .*
- ✓ *Because of my political opinions, I have been put down by staff.*
- ✓ *I can see how it would be hard for other people to make it through the program as fast as I did. It might take them longer to build up trust.*
- ✓ *I've had staff that set me up so that I really got in a lot of trouble for something I didn't do.*
- ✓ *We have staff that come work [with us] from [another group]. They talk about those people. I think, "Oh God, what are they saying about me to them?"*

Interpretation/Analysis This research indicates these girls distrust the system before they even get into it. This means that to reach these girls, there needs to be a platform of trust on which to build a relationship. Right now, many of these girls say they do not trust staff enough in order to open up to them. Many say they don't even feel comfortable going to staff with more basic problems like grievances. This would indicate some guidelines need to be established in order to

create an environment in which a relationship can develop. First and foremost it seems that these guidelines must address trust and confidentiality. Relationships are such a big part of many of these girls' lives that the key to making real progress with these girls is somehow developing a positive, supportive one.

Perhaps more alarming than the abuse these girls here faced in their history are their reports of abuse within the juvenile justice system. Perhaps the greatest obstacle to trust and progress within the juvenile justice system comes through the acts of abuse occurring within the juvenile justice system, according to these girls and experts. Some of the girls say they are being abused by those within the system before there is even a court referral. Some experts also say that these girls are justified in their fear once they are in the system.

- ✓ *I've been through times where I'd get pulled over and the police would ask for sexual favors or dancing and [in return] they wouldn't tumme in. Males tend to persuade you to do things you don't want to do. Then they turn you in anyway.*
- ✓ *When I see a staff [member] hitting someone, I don't want to see it.*
- ✓ *... this woman still works here. She had her [a juvenile] up against the wall and was choking her. ... Another staff had to calm her down. ... she wouldn't leave. You know, they tell us that you're supposed to walk away from the situation but they don't.*
- ✗ *After having a girl stay at one of these places, they come back more hardened. More females are involved with vicious acts. It's as if they have no heart.*
- ✓ *At one program, [a juvenile treatment facility], I was raped by a staff member there. I reported it, but the physical proof wasn't there. He was hired back, and I had to go back there.*
- ✓ *I don't really feel safe. Say [for example a girl] got mad at her and starts saying stuff to her and starts getting up in her face. I personally [feel] there's only one staff [member] that I feel would really even support, that would say, "Hey, you knock it off!" ... It ain't very secure here.*
- ✓ *I went to school and it was hard to get up the strength to go and tell them that I was being abused. I didn't want my brother and me to get hurt anymore. My counselor said they'd get in touch with someone who would help. They called my parents, so that led to a big beating. I was basically abused for [reporting a abuse to a counselor]. Emergency services should take them away from the house and then [investigate]. I think they need to get it done faster and more efficiently.*

- ✖ *They have to protect themselves from physical and verbal, emotional abuse all the time. And that doesn't mean men*
- ✓ *I think under the right circumstances, [a juvenile treatment facility could have helped me]. The circumstances that were going on there I don't think they were very healthy. The first or second time I was there, a staff member there was sexually abusing kids, putting kids down*
- ✓ *There have been incidences of sexual assault, and this guy [a treatment facility staff member] had a history of that. How could you not check that out?*
- ✓ *Someone said they were racist against Native Americans, and I'm Native American. I comforted that person. To this day I have never liked that person. They still work at the [facility].*

Interpretation/Analysis Findings indicate implications of this history of abuse are very serious. These girls do not trust or reach out to anyone. They internalize their suffering; their self-esteem plummets and any violent acts are usually against their own bodies. Research indicates that by the time someone steps in building a relationship based on trust should be the ultimate, yet most challenging, goal. Abuse within the system starts the girls out in a system that has already destroyed their trust and could undermine any potential for establishing the necessary relationship.

B. ADJUSTING TO MEET GIRLS' NEEDS

Experts say that some juvenile justice staffers are reluctant to work with girls. They say that some consider girls more difficult than boys and say that girls wear them out. Some directors say that their staff, males and females alike, say that they wish the facility only served boys.

- ✖ *Ask most people, they'll tell you, "I'd rather work with guys," and even the female staff would say that— "God, I just wish we served guys." How am I going to get these people to think about more sensitive programming for these women and what I get back is "keep them outta here!"*
- ✖ *I used to think that I didn't like to work with girls. . . . But all of the research was on males. I didn't have anything on females. There wasn't a thing in there about girls, but I knew that this didn't work for girls.*
- ✖ *You shouldn't be working with girls if you don't want to.*
- ✖ *I have staff who say, "I'm tired of having 50 girls on my caseload, because they wear you out." It is time for equality. The men don't want the girls for the same*

Interpretation/Analysis This study indicates some of this additional stress reported as a result of working with girls is legitimate. Experts say it can be more challenging to work with girls because they tend to snowball their problems and it requires additional effort to establish the necessary relationships needed to make real progress; however, this research also indicates that this stress could be reduced through training that would acknowledge the differences between boys and girls. Experts say too often staff are trying to deal with females using the male model they were trained under and running into brick walls. This would imply that new or additional training is needed not only to benefit the female juvenile offenders, but to help out the staff as well.

There is strong support for gender specific programming. This support comes from the experts and juveniles alike. They say effective programming needs to acknowledge the differences between girls and boys.

- ✖ *[Gender specific programming is] very important. There are different issues. For example, the difference between fathers' roles and mothers' roles. You need to engage them differently.*
- ✓ *Females need special treatment because society tells us we suck. We can't do anything if we think we don't deserve it. We are different.*
- ✖ *It's real important and we need more of it*
- ✖ *Issues for females are different than issues for males. Therefore, services must be gender specific.*
- ✖ *Girls have issues that are different than boys; most programs are based on male designed models.*
- ✓ *Because there are a lot of females that are afraid to speak out and seek out attention [appropriately].*
- ✖ *Girls are different than boys and should be treated so. Don't they deserve it?*
- ✖ *Girls have different, unique needs; programs presently were developed by males for males.*
- ✖ *Girls are developmentally different than boys.*
- ✓ *[It's important to have] other girls to talk to and not have to worry about boys.*

- ✗ *Girls have specific and different needs– these differences need to be recognized, valued, and incorporated into programs.*
- ✗ *Females have different needs based on females development! And the world needs to acknowledge that!*
- ✓ *Because men are different and so are we. We need different things.*
- ✗ *I think a big thing is that you don't have to turn girls into boys. It's recognizing what each gender brings to a situation and valuing that.*

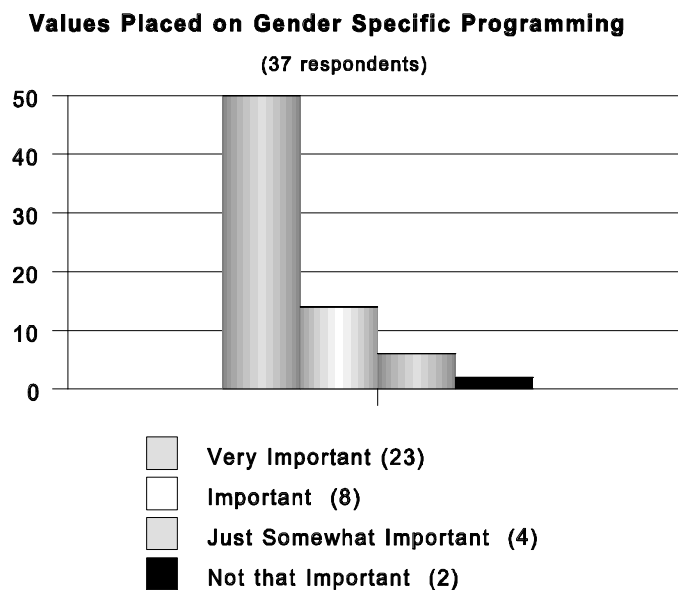


Chart Note These numbers reflected in this chart are the result from the fax/mail survey sent to facilities across the state. The same question was asked to the round table participants where all 12 participants responded that gender specific programming was “very important.”

While the support for gender specific programming is strong, experts and girls agree that individualized programming may be even more important. Experts participating in this

study say that programming would be more effective if the services within the program were tailored more toward *individual* needs. The current system is oriented more toward trying to find the program that fits the girls most closely rather than taking the program and making it fit the person experts say.

- ✖ *Differences should be dealt with on a one-to-one basis.*
- ✖ *Instead of a line, it needs to be a circle. We are channeling kids into slots depending on the funding.*
- ✖ *Illinois has a treatment plan that you enter on a case-by-case basis. I'd like the money to go to individuals rather than a system.*

Girls participating in this research say they feel shortchanged when programming is not individualized. They say that individually tailored programs would be more effective. Every girl is different and has different needs and issues but the current system does not acknowledge this, girls say.

- ✓ *I feel [individualized programming] is more fair; it's like, you can't treat me the exact way you're treating everybody else . . .*
- ✓ *In group homes, you don't have [individualized programming]. Everybody works on the same program. But how am I going to go home and make it?*
- ✓ *You work on life skills, and sobriety, but what about you, individually?*
- ✓ *Individual programs [would work]. Like, "You can't treat me like you treat them."*
- ✓ *Work hard on every individual. You can't just focus on a whole group.*

Interpretation/Analysis Though the research indicates behavioral *tendencies* for girls, these are only tendencies and ideally the system would have enough flexibility to design program goals and activities around the specific needs of the individual girls.

Some experts say that changes that may benefit girls, might benefit boys as well. While these experts say that boys are getting into the system faster and earlier than girls, they may not be doing better with boys *per se*. These experts say that maybe there are better programs for boys, too, particularly more individualized approaches.

- ✖ *Girls need to be treated much differently, however the boys could benefit from being treated more like girls.*

- ✕ *I don't know [if the system is treating boys] better, but more often*
- ✕ *Well, it gets them into a system sooner. I don't know if they're being treated better though.*

Interpretation/Analysis This research reveals authorities within the system who feel that boys could benefit just as much as females from more individualized programming. Others also say boys would benefit from less confrontation programming as well. This study does not look at the needs of boys, so these comments are not substantiated with data and would require a separate study for confirmation, but there is some indication that perhaps programming changes need to be made for males and females alike.

Confrontation models, as they are currently used, do not work as well for girls say experts and juveniles. Girls say that confrontation is currently being used at a level that is unrealistic and not applicable to life outside of placements. Experts say that girls have a harder time with the confrontation model because they would rather support each other than confront each other.

- ✓ *Yeah, you confront people, but people in that [facility] gotta learn how to confront people in a helpful way. They can't confront people to get back at each other or have power over somebody. That's a big thing that the girls need to learn. What is the difference between helpful confronting and gettin'-back confronting.*
- ✓ *They tell us to confront our peers. . . . What's that making us? Nothing . . . one girls gets mad at you and we all start playing get-back games. . . . Everybody just against each other. And the staff sits back writing a log about it, and holds it against us.*
- ✓ *I accidentally dropped my roll in my pudding and thought it tasted pretty good. All the food purists at the table were like, "OOOH!" and the staff came over and said, "You can NOT do that!" . . . Yeah, some thinking needs to be charged, but whether I eat pudding with a roll, I'm going to do that when I get out!*
- ✓ *We need people that are gonna support us. If it [confrontation] was [done] more privately . . . maybe people wouldn't take it like they do. When someone walk up to you and say, "You gonna take a look at this." You say, "What?" That's kind of embarrassing when everybody else is around. . . . Then you gotta fill everybody else in. But we can't do that to them [staff]. You might want to take a look at this, but you can't do that in front of group. We got to be secretive. We gotta*

take them into another room where nobody is . . .

- ✓ *It's so fake. We wouldn't act like that on the outs.*
- ✓ *I don't think it works. They should have a time of day when they all sit down and lay out their concerns, so they can give it a group focus.*

Interpretation/Analysis Female juvenile offenders in this study do not like the confrontation model, and even more significant, often resent staff members for enforcing it. Many times this could create an "us against them" relationship between staff and girls. This again undermines any positive relationships staff and girls have created. It also allows girls to bond on a negative commonality—resentment of staff. Girls would rather feel that they could support each other and concentrate on positives when relating to each other. The only way girls say the confrontation model would work better for them is if they could see it applied in a way that the confrontation is more realistic and applicable to life outside of placement.

C. CURRENT SERVICES

Counseling is the most common service provided in programs for juvenile offenders.

Counseling is done through individual sessions or group sessions. Many facilities use both. Some detention center directors wish they could do more with counseling. Groups and counseling programs deal with a wide variety of issues. They can address family problems, behavior management, and surviving abuse, among others. Many of these girls use the counseling to deal with abuse and victim issues.

- ✗ *It talks a lot about victimization. From those groups, girls have asked to have individual time with those counselors.*
- ✗ *We provide AA (Alcoholics Anonymous) and NA (Narcotics Anonymous). We provide rightly groups that will deal with issues of stress management, anger control, preparing for the next placement. There is a lot of one-on-one stuff.*
- ✗ *If money were no object, I'd have a certified counselor, a nurse, we have a contracted nurse, but another thing would be a staff psychiatrist. But see, that's just it. We're just a holding facility and if the juvenile does need to see someone, they'll be transported to that doctor's office.*

Female juvenile delinquents have mixed feelings about counseling. Many girls say they are getting a positive experience out of counseling but wish they could spend more time with their counselor. They say even once weekly sessions would be appreciated. Others say they distrust their counselors. They say they feel unable to disagree with them for fear of being punished for

defiance. Many say they too often feel the counselors are *telling* them what they feel rather than *listening* to how they feel and they are afraid to disagree. Others say counselors make false assumptions, often regarding family life or abuse, that can get the girls in trouble when it is put into the counselor's report.

- ✓ *My counselor– I don't trust her. She asks why we don't trust her, but everything goes right on the computer. Everybody knows.*
- ✓ *I've always heard that we are supposed to have an hour with our counselor per week and I've spent 45 minutes with mine since I've been here. I've been here six months!*
- ✓ *A lot of times, in reports, there's a lot of things that they said I said when I didn't. One place I was told that the reason I did certain things was that my father abused me. I never said that, it was her opinion, but it went in the report as though I said it. It tore my family apart.*
- ✓ *In my first treatment I was afraid to tell my counselor that I didn't want to go home, because everything gets back to your parents.*
- ✓ *A couple of counselors here really help.*
- ✓ *I had this counselor at [a facility], I could tell she really cared about me, even after I punched her and beat her up she stood outside my door and I was beating my head against the floor, and she said to me, 'Even if I have to stand across this steel door and tell you that I love you, I will.' . . . She taught me things. . . . I'll tell my counselor that was in [a facility] anything. But I refuse to . . . when it comes off that they don't care.*

Interpretation/Analysis This research would indicate that when relationships are established between those who work for the system and female juvenile offenders, most often it is with a counselor. When this relationship is established is when these girls have positive things to say about their counselor. When they say they feel they cannot trust their counselor, or that they do not feel a bond with their counselor is when female juvenile offenders have negative things to say about counseling.

Weight comments and forced diets are very serious issues to female juvenile offenders.

Girls say they are forced to diet if staff considers them overweight. They also report that staff and counselors make comments about their weight. They say these comments are derogatory and are said to girls they think are too thin and girls they think are too heavy.

- ✓ *I've heard my counselor and the staff lots of times call me fat. I asked to be put on the diet just so they won't talk to me like that.*
- ✓ *They also cut down people for being too thin. "Bean Pole, if you turn sideways I won't see you." . . . Your self-esteem goes down.*
- ✓ *[When I get out] I'm not going to eat breakfast. I'm going to starve myself.*
- ✓ *My weight has fluctuated because of eating disorders and drugs, but I feel healthy now. I've been so hungry in here that I am ready to go back and dig through the garbage cans like I used to. I've lost eight pounds in one week and that is too much. They still won't take me off the diet. The nurse herself called me obese.*
- ✓ *Is this girl fat? This girl is not fat. [No one should put her on a diet.]*

Interpretation/Analysis Comments from these girls indicate forced diets make girls become extremely conscious of their weight and suffer a blow to their already low self-esteem. Researchers say self-esteem lowers in most all adolescent females, but is worse when the traditional support systems such as family and friends cannot be counted on to have a positive influence as is the case here. The concept of a forced diet can only serve to make a girl more self-conscious of her physical appearance when she needs to be dealing with her mental and emotional states. If this is a program that is retained, the process of determining who needs these diets and who doesn't needs to be thoroughly reexamined.

School is enjoyed more and performance is improved when juvenile offenders are in a treatment facility. Many girls say that their grades and esteem are much improved in their academic life while in a facility. They speak enthusiastically about classes and instructors. The one complaint they have is that more classes should be offered. Experts also speak of the positive attitudes these girls have toward school.

- ✓ *It's more structured so it's harder to get into trouble. The class sizes are smaller so it's easier to learn. My grades are back up to A's and B's.*
- ✓ *You have an Ed. Advisor. They are good. But they don't have a lot of advanced courses, so I can't go to college.*
- ✓ *The teachers are the best part of this program.*
- ✓ *They got me back in school, so that's about the only thing [the system has] done. You have to go to school when you're here.*

- ✓ *They give you a lot of incentive to go to school. You can earn car teen and movies on weekends.*
- ✓ *I'm going to finish high school and become a lawyer. . .*
- ✓ *[School] makes me happy.*
- ✓ *I never did even go to school. All the people I hung around with didn't go either. I wanted to get out and do those negative things. But now, to get out of here you go to school, it's people you thought you'd never meet. They don't use drugs, they're fun to be around.*
- ✓ *Some of the teachers are fun. Your friends are good people.*
- ✓ *I'm going to go to college. I'm going to be a juvenile justice counselor.*
- ✓ *College. My brother wants me to go to Iowa State, but I want to go to South Dakota, or maybe DMACC. I was thinking about psychology. Being a social person, or maybe a activist.*
- ✓ *I thought I was bound to be a failure. Now I score 100% on all my tests. I have all these skills. I thought I was stupid, but I'm intelligent.*
- ✗ *The girls especially like the school system.*

Interpretation/Analysis This study indicates that female juvenile delinquents are enjoying school for several reasons. Prior to placement, school probably seemed restrictive to these girls, but now it is less restrictive than placement so it gives them a sense of freedom for part of the day. To some girls it may simply be an escape from a placement they don't like or they don't feel safe in. Some girls say they feel like they are learning more in school than in placement. They know they are supposed to be learning from placement, but some say they don't feel as if they are and they find that frustrating. Other girls say this is the first time they have ever really done well in school (probably because of highly structured study time enforced in placement) and this newly found success is providing them with a sense of self-worth and achievement.

D. DETENTION

According to directors, overcrowding affects some detention centers more than others .

While some directors report few problems with bed availability, others talk about severe consequences it is causing for both their facility and the juveniles. They say when the

availability is limited— juveniles are being turned away or placed into inappropriate programs.

- ✖ *Right now we have really low numbers so there is no problem in bed availability. Several other detention centers have expanded recently so the overcrowding problem in Iowa is decreased, but we do occasionally get cases from other centers.*
- ✖ *Daily there is a problem with not enough beds. The county has a already approved and is already going a head with building a new facility. If we get a referral and we are full, we explain that to them and ask if placement is necessary. If they say yes then my staff calls me and I look at all the information that we have on current juveniles in the facility. We also call shelters and other detention centers in the state. We do a lot of shuffling in the middle of the night. The judges are placed in extremely difficult positions. They are making important decisions in the middle of the night. Kids are getting released to the street that shouldn't.*
- ✖ *Right now we're almost at capacity; it varies from month to month.*
- ✖ *I think the courts and the probation officers used to have the luxury of taking a look at the child's individual needs and then trying to plug them into the program that would meet those needs. Any more you just look for a open bed. . . . This leads the kids right back into detention*

Interpretation/Analysis With a lack of space in already existing programs, individual needs are even less likely to be met, and even general services cannot be provided.

Girls that are held at detention centers are likely to be held for a wider variety of reasons than boys, directors say. Many say they see girls for non-violent and violent crimes alike. Directors say that they often get girls who have run away from other placements. Some say girls may be held for their own protection as well, especially if there is suspected gang activity.

- ✖ *[These girls are in for] anything as minor as shoplifting, taking their parent's car, to we've held one for murder. Generally stealing, burglaries, occasionally assault.*
- ✖ *[With girls] there is more property crimes, misuse of credit card type of offenses. We do have girls with assault but usually they fall into these categories.*
- ✖ *Most of the females we are getting are on the run from another placement. We have seen a increase in female violent offenders. They are more involved in gang activities.*

- ✖ *There may be a tendency here when there is heavy gang involvement or it is suspected that the girl is being used for weapons holding or drug trafficking to hold her for her own protection. Girls are more likely to be held for their own protection as opposed to the males.*

Interpretation/Analysis While space is limited within detention centers, girls are still sometimes getting in if their personal safety is threatened; particularly when gang activity is suspected. This would indicate some tendencies to recognize the differences between male and female juvenile offenders. While boys too can be threatened by gangs, officials are starting to realize the role of decoy or transporter that girls often play in gangs and how getting caught can put them at risk within their own gang.

VI. GETTING GIRLS OUT OF THE SYSTEM...

A THE MANIPULATION GAME

Many of these girls say that they can get out of these facilities if they just "play the game."

They say that cooperating with the staff will get them out even if they are doing it for the sole purpose of looking agreeable. They say they will also tell counselors what they feel they want to hear. They are well versed on the terminology and say they have been in the system long enough to be conditioned to appropriate responses.

- ✓ *Fake it 'til you make it.*
- ✓ *If you work the program, you can get out.*
- ✓ *I'm going to do drugs. No one can stop me from doing it. They can put me in treatment and I'll stop long enough to get out in the real world again. People do that. I know they do that. They totally front their way in the system because the system lets them front their way.*
- ✓ *I fronted my way through all the treatments.*
- ✓ *I asked a friend to go to the bathroom [urinate] for me. When they come to check you, they make you leave the bathroom door open, but they don't watch you. I poured it in and acted normal when I gave it to them. My U.A. came back clean.*
- ✓ *We know the law, we know how to fool them. When I was at [a treatment facility], the counselor told me I didn't have a drug problem. I acted sweet.*

- ✓ *I don't work for the system, I work to get out of the system.*

B. THE NEED FOR FOLLOW-UP

These girls and experts agree that there is a question on whether girls are getting the proper training and transitions to return home. They say that more follow-up care is needed. Many girls say that the program isn't effective in dealing with the real world.

- ✗ *And you run a kid through this structured environment, and turn right around and release him into the same environment. Between his drunk parents and doped-up friends, you've lost everything in two hours that you've done with those kids in the past two weeks. No follow-up.*
- ✓ *When you're at home, back with your people, that's when the challenges are going to come. They don't even take a look at that. . . . You know, he's going to send me home, where all this stuff gotta hit me at once.*
- ✓ *They got to focus on what's in the real world, they can't just shut them down from what's in the real world and then set them free. You have to transition them.*
- ✗ *I'd like the money to provide support for girls that have left our program, so that she can have practice and success in an environment that isn't so structured. . . . Preferably someone from the program that the girl already knows.*
- ✓ *[We need] lots of support. Counseling when you get out, not just when you're locked up.*
- ✓ *I'm scared of failing.*
- ✗ *Change is a process, not a beginning and an end. People expect that "this part should be over" and it doesn't work like that.*
- ✓ *The hard thing will be staying sober and out of possessive relationships.*
- ✓ *You need something to keep you on focus. You're going to want to do things that you shouldn't.*

- ✗ *There needs to be flexibility so that I have time to do things.*
- ✓ *After you've been in placement for two-and-a-half years and you go out there, there's so much freedom and there's no accountability to no one but yourself.*
- ✗ *I would like to see mandated follow-up and evaluation. That usually goes first because of resources.*

Interpretation/Analysis This research implies that without the follow-up evaluation and services, many times girls could end up right back in the system. This would indicate that routine after-treatment services could prevent a girl coming back into the system and having to start the charging process all over again. Not only would this be much better for the girl and reduce the stress on staff, but it would also save valuable funding resources. Follow-up care, while it does cost more, costs much less than putting a girl back into placement again according to these experts. Cutting after-care, they say, seems penny-wise but pound foolish.

VII. SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Businesses do all sorts of research to figure out who their customer is and how to engage that customer. I think of that comment, it would be like a business saying, "Well, what's wrong with these customers? They just don't buy it."

Focus group respondents are not selected at random. Consequently, their responses cannot be projected to larger populations. The numerical data was often derived from a small base that would limit its ability to be statistically significant, so it too, cannot always be projected to larger populations. With that understanding, the authors make the following recommendations based strictly on the responses of these focus group participants and results of the numerical data collection.

- Look at the effectiveness and feasibility of establishing follow-up evaluation and transitional programming to provide all girls with support when they leave these highly structured programs in order to help them adjust to the real world and prevent them from returning into the juvenile justice system;
- Consider adjusting training to acknowledge gender differences to ease stress on staff members and make programming more effective for girls;
- Consider eliminating the confrontive model style of programming for girls. If elimination does not seem realistic or always appropriate, consider reworking this model so that girls can envision application to real world settings and so that the model can work in a more supportive manner;
- Work with the communities and schools to implement programs that recognize all

symptoms of at risk children including warning signs of inward directed anger and provide training for parents, educators, police, and other professionals in recognizing those warning signs;

- Work with communities and schools to develop activities and events that provide youth with a creative outlet, particularly supporting work-based learning initiatives;

- Identify community resources able to provide female juvenile delinquents with mentors that could give these girls positive, caring relationships with an adult. These mentors can also act as role models and remain a positive influence throughout and after treatment;
- Identify community resources able to provide families with support and assistance from the beginning— such as programs for new parents covering issues such as basic care and establishing positive relationships;
- Review the reward structure so that going home to a nonabusive or negative home environment is not seen as a reward. Consider more structured family activities and visitations and removing these from part of the reward structure ;
- Look at the effectiveness and feasibility of establishing a budgeting and programming system that would be flexible and allow more individualized program structuring so that unique needs are met;
- Consider greater integration of treatment/programming for female juvenile offenders with family. Treatment needs to promote healthier home environments ;
- Consider any recommendations and their potential to improve treatment for male juvenile delinquents as well as female juvenile delinquents ;
- Consider adjusting group home/placement policies that undermine girls' trust, e.g., holding staff meetings off-site so girls don't feel "talked about," or reviewing criteria for reporting to others (including a girls' family) what transpires during counseling or group sessions;
- As part of the training on early warning signs, offer police guidelines on handling early encounters with females to help assure earlier interventions when needed ;
- Consider mandatory, computerized and consistent statistical reporting of girls and services throughout the juvenile justice system . Without better data in the future, assessing success or failure of revised treatment methods or program services will be difficult, if not impossible;
- Consider looking at the various facilities and departments for incidences of abuse within the system . Try to introduce appropriate screening methods and training procedures that would prevent any abuse before staff members have contact with female juvenile delinquents.